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ABSTRACT

Attitudes toward aging among 142 full-time students and 216 graduates at three urban campuses of a religious college were assessed. Respondent subgroups included rabbis, educators, cantors, and communal service workers. Social attitudes were measured by the Aging Semantic Differential (Rosencranz and McNevin, 1969). Respondents rated 32 dimensions for two categories of people: young people between 15 and 25 years old and old people between 65 and 75 years old. Both respondent groups perceived older people to be more autonomous or independent than young people, while they were more positive in their attitudes toward the young than the old on the issue of capacity for goal achievement or effectiveness. Additionally, when all attitudinal measures are aggregated, younger people were given more positive ratings than the elderly by both students and graduates. The Facts on Aging Quiz (Palmore, 1977) also was administered to determine knowledge about aging. Students were least knowledgeable about the demography of aging, psychological stress and aging, boredom and old age, poverty, and religiosity in old age. Recent graduates displayed similar misconceptions. Students and graduates in the area of communal services obtained the highest scores, while those in the area of education obtained the lowest scores. It is recommended that more attention be given to learning about the human life cycle, age-related stresses, and societal changes. Additional recommendations are offered, and topical areas are suggested for the study of education, cantorial, rabbinical, and communal service students. A bibliography is appended. (SW)

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KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES, AND GERONTOLOGICAL WORK PREFERENCES AMONG STUDENTS OF RELIGION

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INTRODUCTION

An understanding of the age-related orientations of students of religion may provide clues as to whether rabbis, ministers, priests, pastoral community workers and religious educators will readily accept the challenge of working with the elderly. Nearly fifteen years ago Kastenbaum (1964) characterized the "reluctant therapist" as one who looks to avoid the older person seeking help. Is there a similar syndrome among rabbinical and pastoral students? Will students of religion have the necessary knowledge and normative orientations to work with the elderly? The expansion in the number of aging people and the relentless increase in life expectancy coupled with anticipated increases in the age profile of religious congregants makes the answers to these questions ever more crucial.

THE SURVEY STUDY

This paper reports on a study of attitudes toward aging among full time students (N=142) as well as their graduate counterparts (N=216) at three urban campuses of a major college of religious instruction. Respondent subgroups were designated by area of training and encompassed rabbis, educators, cantors and communal service workers. Data was also collected from study respondents as to their aging knowledge levels, anticipated and actual experiences in working with older persons and the adequacy of their preparedness for handling age-related pastoral and community assignments. The study was conducted during the period January, 1980 to February, 1981 and is based on original data obtained by

means of structured survey instruments. The questionnaires incorporated original items as well as several previously validated indices and scales used to guage personal attitudes and knowledge of the aging process and older persons. Reference is made here to the "Aging Semantic Differential" (Rosencranz and McNevin, 1969), the "Facts on Aging Quiz" (Palmore, 1977) and several items included in the National Council on Aging, Inc. study of the myths and realities of aging in America (Harris and Associates, Inc., 1974).

THE MEASUREMENT INDICES

In order to measure social attitudes, this study utilized the Rosencranz and McNevin (1969) "Aging Semantic Differential". Respondents were requested to separately rate 2 categories of people ("social objects"): young people beteen the ages of 15 and 25 and old people between the ages of 65 and 75. These comparative assessments were made on a 32 item, seven point scale consisting of pairs of bipolar adjectives. The pairs of adjectives are meant to measure the stereotypic attitudes of the test subjects and determine the content or dimensions of such attitudes. The higher the aggregate score on the semantic differential, the more negative the subject's perception or connotative judgment of the "social object" in question. Conversely, the lower the overall score, the more positive the respondent's assessment of the age cohort under consideration.

The "Aging Semantic Differential" has known factorial content. Rosencranz and McNevin (1969) were able to identify three main connotative factor loadings in the 32 adjective pairs. These dimensions or attitudinal measures are: Instrumental-Ineffective (I-I) composed of nine adjective pairs (e.g., productive/unproductive, aggressive/defensive, busy/idle); Autonomous-Dependent (A-D) composed of nine adjective pairs (e.g., independent/dependent, rich/poor, self-reliant/dependent); and Personal Acceptability-Unacceptability (PA-U) composed of fourteen adjective pairs (e.g., handsome/ugly, happy/sad, neat/untidy, pleasant/unpleasant). The author's of the scale pointed out that a person ("social object") who receives a positive or low mean score on the I-I dimension is considered capable of pursuing goals, being adaptive to change and displaying high energy output. Positive scores on the A-D dimension indicate the rater perceives the social object in question to be contributing substantially to his social system to an equal or greater extent than he/she derives from others. Positive scores assigned by a rater on the PA-U dimension or attitudinal measure indicates the "social object" is perceived to be well integrated or actively interacting in his social environment.

Table 1 summarizes the number of scale items included in each attitudinal (semantic differential) measure as well as the results of reliability analysis for each individual and total dimensional measure.

As measures of internal consistency, the Cronbach standardized item alphas obtained were high for all dimensional and aggregate scale measures. Alphas ranged from .85 to .91 where the "social

objects" rated were people aged 15 to 25 years of age and from .90 to .94 where the "social objects" were people 65 to 75 years of age.

Table I

Scale Item Information and Reliability Analysis
For Composite Attitudinal (Semantic Differential) Measure

Attitudinal (Semantic) (Differential) Measure	Social Object[t]	Number of Scale Items	Standardized Item Alpha (Internal Consistency)
Instrumental-Ineffective Dimension	Y	9	.85
	O	9	.92
Autonomous-Dependent Dimension	Y	9	.87
	O	9	.90
Personal Acceptability Unacceptability Dimension	Y	14	.91
	O	14	.94
Total Semantic Differential Measure	Y	32	.87
	O	32	.93

[t]Y=Young People Between the Ages of 15 and 25

O=Old People Between the Ages of 65 and 75

FINDINGS

Attitudes and Aging

Table 2 presents obtained descriptive statistics (mean item scores and standard deviations) and results of t-tests (separate variance estimates) on the student and graduate respondent groups across the different attitudinal (semantic differential) measures. In assessing the overall appreciation by survey respondents for young people and old people as defined above, it was found that both students and graduates are more positive in their attitudes toward the young than the old when the issue of capacity for goal achievement or effectiveness was under consideration (I-I). On the other hand, both survey groups perceive older people to be more autonomous or independent than young people (A-D). Concerning the extent of personal acceptability or social integration, the two social object groups received similar scores clustered around the theoretical mid-point (3.5) of the scale's 1-7 continuum. Finally, both survey groups had lower (more positive) scores on the total semantic differential when assessing the younger age cohort as compared to the older age group. Again, mean item scores tend to gravitate to the neutral area of the semantic differential, especially in the case of assessments by respondents of young people 15-25 years of age.

T-values and 2-tailed probability tests for students and graduates emphasize that intergroup perceptions are congruent on 7 of the 8 measures. The single measure on which there is strong disagreement is that of the instrumental capacities of older

Table 2

Mean Item Scores[t] on Attitudinal (Semantic Differential) Measures for Current Students and Recent Graduates (Separate Variance Estimates)

Attitudinal (Semantic Differential) Measure	Social Object	Respondent Group					
		Current Students		Recent Graduates		t Value	Sig.
		Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.		
Instrumental-Ineffective Dimension (I-I)	People 15-25	2.81	.74	2.81	.65	.01	N.S.
	People 65-75	4.37	.75	4.08	.79	3.41	p<.001
Autonomous-Dependent Dimension (A-D)	People 15-25	4.51	.71	4.39	.70	1.54	N.S.
	People 65-75	3.69	.79	3.62	.78	.87	N.S.
Personal Acceptability-Unacceptability Dimension (PA-U)	People 15-25	3.73	.61	3.62	.59	1.67	N.S.
	People 65-75	3.62	.72	3.55	.70	.86	N.S.
Total Semantic Differential	People 15-25	3.66	.53	3.57	.44	1.55	N.S.
	People 65-75	3.83	.57	3.70	.62	1.94	N.S.

[t]Theoretical Score Range: 1-7; where 1=very favorable and 7=very unfavorable.
N.S.=Not Significant

people ($t=3.41$; $p<.001$). In the case of effectiveness, pastoral graduates displayed significantly more positive attitudes toward the aged than students. Nevertheless, younger people continued to be looked upon more favorable by graduates (Mean=2.81; S.D.=.65) than older persons (Mean=4.08; S.D.=.79) along the I-I dimension. It is worth noting that when the survey respondent groups were diseggregated by professional discipline (area of training) there were no significant intragroup differences in attitudinal orientation toward either young or old social object groups.

In order to determine the extent of differential rater perceptions for young versus old age cohorts within each attitudinal dimension, correlated t-tests were performed between social object groups for each attitudinal measure. Both students and graduates hold here significantly more positive attitudes toward the younger person's capacity for effectiveness, activity and goal attainment. T values of -17.38 ($p<.001$) and -16.60 ($p<.001$) for students and graduates respectively on the I-I dimension serve to emphasize this point. Conversely, both students ($t=10.44$; $p<.001$) and graduates ($t=12.66$; $p<.001$) consider older people to be significantly more autonomous or independent than the young. As suspected the mean scores for both survey groups along the PA-U dimension do not different significantly for the young and old as social object groups. Both age groups are considered to be equally acceptable or desirable in the eyes of the survey respondents. Finally, when all attitudinal measures are aggregated, younger people are given more positive ratings

than the elderly by both students ($t=2.65$; $p<.01$) and graduates ($t=2.59$; $p<.01$).

Several questions that had been used in previous surveys of attitudes toward aging (Borges and Dutton, 1976; Harris, et al., 1976) were modified and also included in this study. Survey groups were asked to indicate which, in their opinion, are the "best" and "worst" years of a person's life. Respondents were given time periods to choose from ranging from childhood through the eight decade of life. Fully 3 of every 10 student respondents (32.3 percent) and almost half of the graduate respondents (47.5 percent) declined to choose a particular time period as being the "best" in a person's life. Similarly 29.8 percent of the students responding to the question and 43.5 percent of the graduates would not specify a particular period as being the "worst". Reasons given for this noncommittal response was that any period in life has the potential for being rewarding or not depending on personal circumstances. For this group of respondents, a particular point in life was not by itself a sufficiently influential factor to determine the relative quality of life.

For those students (N=90) and graduates (N=108) willing to identiry a particular period of life as being generally the "best", the third decade of life was most often chosen by both groups. Students then identified the twenties as being the best, followed by the fourties. Graduates, on the other hand, were slightly more likely to specify the fourties as the "best"

time of life followed closely by the twenties.

As has been borne out in prior research (Borges and Dutton, 1976), a positive correlation existed between age and the "best year" selected in a person's life ($r=.15$; $p<.05$). That is, as the respondent's increased in age their perceptions of the "best" years of life also increased. This suggests an "increasing optimism" toward the years ahead as one ages.

It is worthy of note that scores on the Rosencranz and McNevin (1969) Semantic Differential (for old "social object" groups) were positively correlated with respondent perceptions of the "best" years of life. That is, respondents who perceived the aged to be more instrumentally effective (I-I dimension), more autonomous or independent (A-D dimension) and more personally acceptable (PA-U dimension) were significantly more likely to perceive the years ahead more optimistically. Pearson product correlation coefficients of .20 ($p<.005$), .16 ($p<.05$) and .20 ($p<.005$) for the I-I, A-D and PAU-U dimensions respectively and "best" years selected confirm this point. A similarly high correlation coefficient ($r=-.19$; $p<.01$) was obtained for the total aging semantic differential and "best" years selected.

Knowledge of the Aging Process

In order to determine what survey respondents knew or failed to know about aging, Palmore's (1977) Facts on Aging Quiz (FAQ) was administered to both current students and graduates. The FAQ is a 25 item test designed to measure an individual's knowledge of certain basic physical, mental and social facts as well as the most frequent misconceptions about aging. As displayed in previous studies, both group score reliability

(consistency across comparable educational groups and control group test-retest), and rank ordering reliability of items by percentage wrong has been high (Palmore, 1977; Palmore 1980). On the other hand, item to total reliability has tended to be low due presumably to the variety of factual probes included in the instrument (Klemmack, 1978). All items would appear to have a high degree of face validity. Indeed, Palmore reports that those who have been trained in gerontology and could be expected to perform better on the test, in fact score favorably (Palmore, 1980).

As might be expected, there was great variability across respondent groups in terms of what is known and not known about aging. Students were least knowledgeable (achieving less than 40 percent correct response rates) about the demography of aging, psychological stress and aging, boredom and old age, poverty and financial status, and religiosity in old age. Recent graduates displayed similar high misconceptions about demography, psychological stress, boredom, and religiosity. In addition, fewer than 40 percent of the graduates had accurate understanding of the fact that all senses tend to decline in old age. On the other hand, at least 90 percent of students answered 8 statements correctly. Graduates succeeded with seven. Statements that were understood over 90 percent of the time by both groups included those referring to the incidence of senility among the aged, old people's continued interest in sexual relations, the fact that old people do not usually feel miserable, the

decline of physical strength in old age, an older person's capacity to learn new things, and the heterogeniety of the aged cohort.

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) performed between groups for each respondent group variable underscores remarkable consistency throughout. At no time do between-group differences reach statistical significance. The current student respondent group achieved a mean correct response level of 15.53 (S.D.=2.62) whereas recent graduates emerged with a mean FAC score of 15.77 (S.D.=2.72) (t=-0.85; d.f.=309.44; p=.390). Thus students and graduates come out with almost identical correct response rates of 62.1 percent and 63.1 percent, respectively. Taken together, the average score by survey respondents is only 12.5 percent better than what would be expected from chance alone. It is worthy of note that the difference in knowledge scores approached significance in the case of student's area of training (F=2.28; d.f.=3; p=.08) and graduate's area of training (F=1.94; d.f.=3; p=.12). In each case those being trained and those having been trained in communal services obtained the highest scores and those being trained/having been trained in education emerged with the lowest test scores. Cantorial and rabbinical students and graduates lie in between.

Palmore (1977; 1980) has argued that the FAQ may be used to identify the most common misconceptions or biases toward the aged. That is, incorrect answers to particular FAQ items reflect negative bias, incorrect answers to other items reflect positive bias and incorrect answers to still a third set of FAQ

items indicate neutral attitudinal stances. An indirect, albeit weak, measure of attitudes toward the aged can, therefore, be derived. Data were analyzed for direction of bias by respondent group for quiz items which were answered correctly less than 65 percent of the time. Students and graduates again emerged with parallel views. In fact, they displayed identical biases (both positive and negative) for all quiz items. Thus for seven items a negative bias was evidenced. Three items in turn indicated positive bias among the respondents. The overall direction of bias toward the aged for both students and graduates was therefore, unequivocally negative. Respondents were considerably more pessimistic about the status and skills of older people than actual conditions would dictate. This negativistic "climate of opinion" or normative stance among respondents reflected the mistaken belief that older people are often irritated and angry, bored, living in poverty, institutionalized in homes for the aged or nursing facilities, the cause of more accidents when driving, socially isolated and lonely and involved in more accidents in the workplace than younger workers. A tendency was noted for students to be more negativistic in their biases than graduates for 6 of the 7 "negative bias" items. On the other hand, respondents were overly optimistic or wished to deny the natural decline with age in the physiological (lung capacity), sensorial (sensory capacity) and learning (acquisitional capacity) domains.

Positive correlations were found to exist between knowledge level (as measured by FAQ scores) and attitudes toward the aged (as measured by Rosencranz and McNevin's Semantic Differential).

Thus, the more positive the attitudes about old people, the greater the knowledge about aging. This finding held true for both current student respondents and recent graduate respondents. These correlations reached a level of significance in the case of students for the instrumental-ineffective dimension ($r=.26$; $p<.005$), the autonomous-dependent dimension ($r=.20$; $p<.05$) and the total semantic differential ($r=.18$; $p<.05$) where the social objects were "people between the ages of 65 and 75". In the case of graduate respondents, significant positive correlations were found between FAQ scores and the instrumental-ineffective dimension ($r=.18$; $p<.01$), the autonomous-dependent dimension ($r=.17$; $p<.01$) and the total semantic differential ($r=.19$; $p<.005$) for these same social objects. Correlations between knowledge and the personal acceptability-unacceptability dimension (social objects=people between the ages of 65 and 75), though positive, were not statistically significant. It is interesting, if not somewhat thought-provoking, to note that there was a tendency for negative correlations to emerge between knowledge of aging and attitudes toward young people (15 to 25 years of age). This tendency reached a level of significance for the graduates surveyed when FAQ scores and the instrumental-ineffective measure were compared ($r=.13$; $p<.05$). Thus, the greater the knowledge of aging the more negative the attitudes toward young people.

Consideration is given here to saliert relationships between factual knowledge of aging (FAQ scores) and selected other study variables.

a. Age. Negative correlations were found for both students (r=-.13; p=.07) and graduates (r=-.07; p=.15) though they fell short of statistical significance. This indicated a weak tendency for knowledge to increase as age decreased.

b. Level of Training. A positive correlation boardering on statistical significance appeared for students (r=.14; p=.05) indicating increases in knowledge to be associated with progression from one year to the next in the academic program.

c. Priority Assigned to Working with Older Adults. A significant positive correlation emerged for both students (r=.17; p=.02) and graduates (r=.14; p=.02). That is, increases in knowledge are associated with heightened desire to work with the aged.

d. Priority Assigned to Working with Adolescents and Young Adults. Graduates registered significant and borderline significant negative correlations between knowledge and the priority they assigned to working with adolescents (r=-.17; p=.008) and young adults (r=-.09; p=.09) respectively. That is, higher levels of knowledge about the aged is associated with a lessened desire to work with younger age groups.

e. Preparedness to Deal With Older People's Needs. Among students, increases in knowledge tend to be associated with the belief that the college is adequately preparing them to deal with the needs of older people (r=.11; p=.10).

f. Importance of the Issue of Old Age. A significant positive association existed between graduate respondent's knowledge and the importance of the issue of old age in their lives. (r=.19; p=.002). An increase in FAQ scores was accompanied by

an increase in the importance of the issue of old age for graduates.

Study Recommendations

The recommendations to follow represent a synthesis of findings from statistically significant data sources and qualitative opinions and comments elicited from all survey respondent groups. These proposals are meant to reflect a realistic approach to gerontological curriculum planning in programs of pastoral study given the multiple and often conflicting educational demands faced by administration, faculty and students.

1) Pastoral students need to be sensitized to the fast approaching aging scenario in this country. Cognizance of the dramatic demographic transformation of American society is essential. Age-related stresses and demands accompanying these changes need to be seen as impacting on college programming and community life.

2) Students need to become better acquainted with the human life cycle, the continuous process of aging and the multiple dimensions of old age. The life course needs to be seen as a sequence connecting all age cohorts through a series of partially overlapping stages.

3) Recognition by students in all disciplines of the unique and complex set of factors that relate to the older person and the aging experience is essential. While all age groups display common needs and desires, older people are confronted with problems and losses rarely encountered by other

age groups.

4) Pastoral administration and faculty need to focus their efforts more on the scholarly or conceptual rather than the practical presentation of gerontological content. Its recognized tradition of the scholarly study of religion suggests its strength would lie in explicating the relationship between old age and religious heritage. Practical and in depth instruction in gerontological topics should result from more formal alliances forged with external direct service and demonstration field sites as well as recognized gerontological centers of learning. Opportunities for students to make use of the benefits growing out of these coalitions needs to be heightened. This will require that schools of religion develop and maintain accurate listings and contacts with appropriate programs of study at other centers of learning within a reasonable distance from the particular campus in question.

5) Beyond the benefits of exposing all disciplines to introductory content in human relations and gerontology, specific professional disciplines and selected students in other disciplines who display special interest in the field of aging need to have guaranteed entry points to intensified gerontological instruction.

6) Recognizing the heavily ladened academic program of study already in place at schools of pastoral instruction, efforts at introducing a gerontological perspective should concentrate on various methods of incorporating such material within the existing curriculum rather than adding additional layers to the educational model.

Structural Implementation

There are at least seven methods or formats in which gerontological content can be structured for student learning. They allow a mix of orientational, experiential and sequential forms of study. Schools might consider using the following modes of instruction depending on the professional discipline in question and the degree to which they desire gerontological learning to be operationalized:

1) Required courses in aging;
2) Aging material integrated into existing required courses;
3) Electives in aging;
4) Aging materials integrated into existing electives;
5) Workshops, symposia and conferences on aging in a religious context;
6) Field work internships in aging service programs; and
7) Cross registration and joint programming with other schools and institutes offering gerontological courses.

Relevant Types of Gerontological Content

The following outline serves to summarize gerontological content of greatest relevance for pastoral students in the various academic disciplines. Slightly greater emphasis is given to the rabbinical and communal service student though the need for certain common educational experiences across all training areas is recognized. Both generalized changes in philosophical orientations and specific modifications in the current program are being proposed based on study findings. These recommendations are not intended to compete with a school's mainstream curriculum but rather

supplement and strengthen the educational objectives of instruction in religion.

a) Education Students

- Religious attitudes toward the aged;
- Adult human development/Life cycle growth/Theories of aging/Stereotypes;
- Adult education curricula planning;
- Continuing education module development/Programming; and
- Learning and cognitive functioning in old age.

b) Cantorial Students

- Religious attitudes toward the aged;
- Adult human development/Life cycle growth/Theories of aging/Stereotypes;
- Pastoral counseling;
- Psychosocial (familial) dimensions of aging; and
- Leisure and recreational programming.

c) Rabbinical Students

- Religious attitudes toward the aged;
- Adult human development/Life cycle growth/Theories of aging/Stereotypes;
- Psychosocial (familial) dimensions of aging;
- Pastoral counseling/Problem solving;
- Problems of aging;
- Understanding referral systems/Public and private resources; and
- Synagogue programming.

d) Communal Service Students

- Religious attitudes toward the aged;
- Adult human development/Life cycle growth/Theories of aging/Stereotypes;
- Psychosocial (familial) dimensions of aging;
- Problems of Aging;
- Supportive counseling/Problem solving;
- Entitlements counseling;
- Understanding referral systems/Public and private resources;
- Communal service and social programming;
- Economics of aging/Politics of aging; and
- Biological/physiological aspects of aging.

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